**Speech – 08.10.2020**

**Planning reform, house building targets and the planning for the future White Paper**

The lack of suitable housing is holding Britain back.

There is wide consensus that getting people onto the housing ladder is critical to levelling up and transforming our economy.

Likewise, transforming the cumbersome and outdated planning system is a vital step in making more housing more accessible to more people.

I completely support the Government’s aim to tackle this considerable problem.

However, I share concerns with many of my colleagues on the details of this plan.

Concerns particularly shared with my next-door neighbour, my Hon. Friend, the Member for Bexhill and Battle.

The changes to the Standard Method are meant to simplify and streamline the planning process. But local conditions still need to be considered.

For instance, in the constituencies of Beautiful Hastings and Rye and Bexhill and Battle, almost 82% of land in Rother District falls within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

This land should be protected from over-development.

Here, the New Standard Method requires over a thousand houses to be built every year, an increase of almost 250% on the Local Plan.

While there is a need for housing, annual construction of over a thousand homes on limited land will only choke up infrastructure and utilities - and alienate residents.

Hastings, caught between two large hills and the sea, will see more than 100% increase in new homes.

We must find a way to streamline this process without putting undue burdens on local authorities and residents, who may have structural problems, effectively blocking them from carrying out the Government’s plan.

The algorithm is flawed.

Reforms are also necessary in land designation.

But land that is protected needs to be further protected so that developers are encouraged to build on areas suitable for growth. And where sites have been allocated for development, and where land has been given planning permission, developers must build - we need the new homes now.

The design approval process needs reform.

Recently, in Rother District, a project was given planning approval but did not move forward for years due to pending design approval. This process can and must be streamlined, to be finished in months and not years.

My Hon. Friend is correct.

We have a once in a generation opportunity to set our housing system right, to offer the opportunity for a suitable home to all in our country, whilst protecting our environment for future generations.

And that is why it is so important for us to get this right.

Let us seize this moment, let us deliver reform that is meaningful and lasting. Only then can we level up our economy and improve the lives of Britons for generations to come.